

The Six Support Trends of the New Millennium

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1. **A Back to Basics approach:**

Please don't forget the basics. With all of the advancement in technology solutions, process improvements and resourcing alternatives, it is the basics that make us successful in the first place. You cannot move to the next level of the Help Desk maturity curve if you have not yet:

- Implemented an ACD system off of your phone switch
- Installed a Call Tracking/Problem Management system
- Attracted and retained qualified and trained professionals
- Established a realistic phone schedule that identifies the TOTAL demand for your services
- Created proper SOP's and successfully delivered the message to your Help Desk professionals on what to do with all problems and requests made by your customers

The basics of setting-up and implementing a support center are equivalent to Maslov's Hierarchy of Needs where food, clothing and shelter are your first order of business. To make the move up the organizational ladder and fulfill a strategic value-added role in the business you will first need to get out of the repetitive and reactive mode of the support process. You can never strive for self-actualization or a strategic role in the company if you cannot deliver tactics and operational procedures first and foremost!

Some back to basics suggestions:

- **Certification/Customer service skills** – schedule the entire team for certification that promotes and teaches best practices in customer services, problem management and follow-up.
- **Root cause analysis** – the first step in proceeding with any continuous improvement project is to know why your customers are calling. If you know WHY people call, then you are better prepared to formulate a strategy or plan that can prevent these calls, inquiries, problems or requests from coming into the Help Desk. Knowing these types of situations will enable you to better design an integrated eSupport strategy that reduces your cost and increases your customers' satisfaction. The eSupport strategy is focused on aligning or partnering the right type of customer requests or problems with the right option that first explores the low-cost solution to either solve the customer's problem or provide the customer the right information.
- **Phone time** – spending time on the phone is a hands-on approach that will give the Help Desk Manager an idea of why customers are calling and how the team is prepared to handle their requests or problems.
- **Assessment** – review where you are with respect to the quality of your service delivery. This should cover your organization and structure, the type of service you provide and how you provide it, standard operating procedure and processes, systems and tools, and your support strategy.
- **Metrics and reporting** – if you don't measure it, you can't improve upon it! The Help Desk manager needs to have access to a Daily Operational Report that details the health of the support business. These reports measure how the support team is delivering support on products and services on a daily basis, both operationally and tactically.

2. An eSupport Strategy

The Internet, enabling technologies and the people who use them have created an opportunity for organizations to redesign their Support strategy. The strategy and vision that takes advantage of these changing forces is an eSupport strategy. By implementing an integrated eSupport strategy, organizations will be positioned to fully maximize their return on investment - an investment that will retain both customers and employees, and is aimed at producing a healthier bottom-line.

Value is defined as lowering support costs throughout the organization, enhancing the customer experience and positioning the support organization to provide business continuity. Business continuity is defined as the uninterrupted use of technology to accomplish business goals. This compelling argument for change envisions a flatter, technology-enabled support strategy providing a higher level of customer satisfaction at a reduced cost, thus positioning eSupport as a business enabler.

Are you concerned about how to exponentially grow your business and your customer base without having to grow your support team? Are you troubled by your inability to identify your support costs and why they keep growing?

The goal of the eSupport Strategy is to put the customer in direct contact with the right resources that will solve their problem or provide them with direct access to what they are asking for. This goal can be realized by eliminating unnecessary customer contacts and middlemen that add no value to the support process. The eSupport strategy asserts that the most effective and efficient way to provide support to the customer is a "straight-line" between the customer and the resolution or answer! The eSupport steps to resolution are that the technology attempts to heal itself first, then the customer attempts to leverage the available self-service options and then finally contacts the support person via the phone, live-chat or email.

What are the costs to the business for NOT implementing an eSupport strategy?

- The cost of losing your customers
- The cost of losing business to your competitors who are adopting an eSupport strategy
- The cost of losing professionals
- The continued rising cost of providing a broken support model
- The cost of managing an unqualified and unavailable support team against a rising demand for service and support

3. Managing Change is Critical to the Help Desk

The most positive result of the Y2K hype is moving the Help Desk into the Change Management process. If problems lead to change and change leads to problems, then the central coordinator of all this problem and change management should originate at the Help Desk. It is imperative that the Help Desk, as a champion and voice of the customer, take the lead as to how change is managed within an organization in order to minimize the impact of change on the customer. Some benefits of a centralized change management function lead by the Help Desk and integrated into the Problem Management system are:

- **Predictability** – the ability to predict an outcome or result based upon past occurrences or performance
- **Risk assessment** – assigning a risk to a particular change that takes into account the magnitude of the change, the technology, the customer base potentially affected and the back-up and restore plan
- **Accuracy and measurement** – measuring how accurate we were in assessing the downtime to implement the change and any related problems that occurred as a result of the change
- **Direct and targeted communication** – sending out system unavailable or system maintenance communications to ONLY the targeted group of affected customers
- **Linking problems to change and change to problems** – the ability to understand the history of the relationship between the cause and effect
- **History** - identifying the point of replacement rather than continuing to update or change

4. **The Enterprise Help Desk**

The Enterprise Help Desk (EHD) is a single point of contact for customers to report problems and make requests for products and services. The EHD not only monitors the health of the entire technology infrastructure; it is the single point of contact for processing all technology and business-related problems, and service and information requests. It's goal is to better leverage the knowledge, tools and process to increase the percentage of calls resolved at the first contact, thereby increasing customer satisfaction and lowering support costs. A continued focus should be placed on Root Cause Analysis to eliminate repetitive problems and identify ways to be proactive and predictive in order to reduce the impact of change on the business.

From a business perspective, the EHD is the first and most important link in the service-profit chain. Technology is a key productivity tool enabling employees to handle the customers' experience effectively and efficiently. The EHD is responsible for the 100% availability of that productivity tool. The rewards of a focused customer satisfaction strategy are customer and employee retention, loyalty and a consistent revenue stream. "The Help Desk is where the action is for interactive service," says the META Group's Bruce Allen. With service management now a critical corporate requirement, the Help Desk presents a major opportunity for IT to prove its worth to end-users and thereby prevent outsourcing which usurps IT's role in distributed systems support.

The EHD is the center of all support activity for the Technology Infrastructure. The one-stop-solution EHD will be actively involved in handling problem management, asset management, change management, network management, desktop management, technology rollouts, and recently business operations and continuity and eCommerce. The EHD is an opportunity for savvy CIOs to invest in a front-line marketing arm for the IT department. Because of its daily interaction with customers, the help Desk should be the central knowledge base and repository for an organization's data, information and knowledge. Decentralized, autonomous Help Desks must consolidate and automate, to keep up with an increasingly distributed and complex computer environment. In addition, Help Desks must strive to be even more efficient and effective in order to support a competitive business environment emphasizing customer service and lower costs.

This vision is where the Technology Infrastructure is available 100% of the time and the EHD, as the center of all support activity, leverages tools and technology to intelligently monitor the health of the Technology Infrastructure. This vision dictates that you manage technology with technology, and automate your manual processes so that your employees can better manage your customer relationships. The EHD will seamlessly monitor all activity generated by self-diagnostics, threshold monitoring and event trapping, and it will be directed to take action by a process driven, rules-based escalation, notification and workflow functionality process. Taking it one step further, the problem ticket will automatically access the problem resolution/knowledge base and attempt to find the solution and either solve the problem in a self-correcting manner or instruct the requestor as to how to resolve it. Simultaneously, customers, employees and key business partners will be accessing the 7x24x365 Intranet, Internet and Extranet and using the self-service tools that enable them to research and solve their own problems, answer their own questions and have access to information on their own terms. The EHD will keep track of all infrastructure activity for historical reporting purposes and will escalate the activity log to a Certified Help Desk Professional when the customer requires additional support, information or assistance.

5. **Changing the Organizational Model**

Today's Help Desk industry is aggressively developing ways to reduce bureaucracy, flatten the organizational chart, and increase the technical and diagnostic knowledge level of the average Help Desk professional. This results in a lean, highly responsive Help Desk team that delivers solutions quicker and with a higher level of personal satisfaction and accomplishment. To improve service delivery by maximizing resource utilization we recommend the merging of Level 1 and Level 2 Help Desk-related functions, both in services and management. The solution to the problem is to realign the organization so that it functions with a singular, shared vision, fully aligned customer service goals, and a clear understanding of industry best practices. The combination of the 1st and 2nd level teams into one team supporting customers, employees and partners though the Internet, Extranet and Intranet creates positive results!

6. Help Desk Managers as Leaders

Help Desk managers have the opportunity to become mini-CEOs or business unit managers. All the knowledge and functions of running a business will come into play as they become a strategic part in helping their organization successfully meet their business challenges and opportunities. So don't wait for a formal training program to be developed or the definitive book to be written. There are informal ways for you to train yourself to be a Help Desk business manager. It's in your hands to elevate your Help Desk and the Help Desk profession to new levels of importance within your organization and the business world. For what you cannot do on your own, look to the networking relationships that you have established with your peers. You will need to develop and fine-tune your skill-sets in the following areas:

- People-Management
- Business Case creation and Financial metrics (e.g. TCO and ROI)
- Marketing
- Communication
- Project Management skills
- Presentation skills
- Technology
- Process orientation skills
- Human Resources

It is an exciting time to be a Help Desk professional. I am optimistic and positive that Help Desks will "seize the day" and take advantage of the numerous opportunities that are waiting for them on the strategic path to providing the business with value-add and a competitive advantage. There is a great demand for Help Desk services and the Help Desk professionals who provide and deliver high quality service. The Help Desk professional skill sets for the new millennium demand a strong blend of customer service skills and an understanding of the business and how technology can be leveraged to improve employee productivity. Stay focused on the basics in the new millennium and let me know your availability for a mission to Mars to implement the first Interplanetary Help Desk.



Peter "Pete" McGarahan is Chairman of STI Knowledge 2000™, a division of STI Knowledge, Inc. STI Knowledge 2000, offers the technical support industry's most widely recognized Help Desk, Call Center, and Knowledge Center education and certification programs. Previously, McGarahan served as executive director of the Help Desk Institute (HDI). Prior to joining HDI, he was director of Help Desk Marketing for Vantive Corporation. McGarahan has over 15 years of experience in IT support, planning, design and development. Under his leadership, the Taco Bell support team achieved the HDI Team Excellence Award. AT STI Knowledge, he is responsible for helping define and grow the eSupport market. McGarahan was selected as one of the "Top 25 Professionals in the Service Industry" by Service News magazine in 1996.

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